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Not In the Wedding Party

By Euphemia Holden

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The best man wove his way in and out of the gay throng at the foot of the stairway. Bright colored confetti decorated the white shoulders of the women and the black coats of the men. The atmosphere vibrated with music and the rustle of gowns.

He walked across the deserted library and, drawing aside the curtains of a small den, stepped into semidarkness.

On the broad window seat a swirl of fluffy white stirred, and a startled head arose.

"Oh, I didn't expect to be found," said the maid of honor ungraciously. "I'm so tired. Are they nearly ready?"

She was rising slowly. "Don't move," commanded the best man. "There is plenty of time."

Tucking the cushions behind her, he sat down in a chair at her side.

"I've done all I could for Ralph," he continued, "and I felt entitled to a breathing space."

"I tried to help Elsa, but there were so many. They are going south, aren't they?"

"In confidence, yes. Stoddard Allen wants to tie them up with white rib-



"OH, I DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE FOUND," SAID THE MAID OF HONOR.

bons and signs. Ralph said if any one tried it he'd handle him without gloves."

"I wouldn't blame him," she laughed, "though a bout in the station might be awkward."

"What a pace we've led the last few days!" he sighed wearily. "You girls seem able to stand it, but personally I'm so muddled I don't know whether it's Ralph's wedding or mine."

"I suppose circumstances also make that difficult to decide."

The best man felt his color rise. He could not see the girl's face distinctly, but he knew the mischievous look that gleamed in her eyes. Of course it was no secret that Elsa and he had been girl and boy lovers, but the thrust piqued him. In fact, their few days' acquaintance had been a series of drawn battles, without malice, but not without keenness.

"Yes," he replied, "though I find I'm glad it's Ralph's, because he is so much happier than I would have been under similar circumstances."

"Ah, the cynic again—woman, a delusion and a snare, and marriage a lottery. No! No! Such sentiments belong to the unintelligent."

"Have you ever been in love?" inquired the best man abruptly. It was the maid of honor's turn to blush. This was not the first time she had found it difficult to get ahead of the best man.

"I have thought I was," she said simply.

"Ex-actly," he went on with measured emphasis. "Then you've ceased thinking so. Later you've studied him calmly and said to yourself, 'A gentleman and eminently respectable, but why did I think I cared for him? When you heard he was engaged to another girl you congratulated him heartily and honestly. Just the same, when they were married, you felt a trifle sad and a trifle lonely; not because you wanted anything changed, merely because it was another chapter closed forever.'"

"How do you know?" she cried, sitting up straight.

He laughed the low, pleased laugh of a flattered man.

"It's the way I feel about Elsa," he said.

"And the way I feel about Ralph," she gasped.

In the silence they could hear the talk and laughter of the wedding guests.

"And yet"—she began.

"And yet," he interrupted, "they are the happy ones. They have found each other."

"And they will be peaceful and contented because real love never analyzes."

"While the left overs—you and I—are sitting in the dark, tired, lonesome, theatrical, yet so hard hearted we wouldn't change."

"Oh, don't!" she said sadly. "Just think of the fairy kingdom that be-

longs to them, all full of romance and fun and companionship. Critical eyes will never see their treasure."

The best man was surprised to hear her catch her breath. He had not connected sentiment with the merry maid of honor, not having realized that a sharp tongue may give utterance to sympathy and gentleness. The discovery opened new vistas to him.

"But not a treasure we should be blind to if we forced our eyes open?"

She shook her head dubiously.

"There's no hope for the analytical. They may peep at a gentle afterglow. One needs to be very young and very rash to find what Elsa and Ralph have found."

"You think it's out of the question for us?"

"You've asked two personal questions. The third is forfeit. I merely meant to speculate. Come! We must go or we'll miss them."

"But if we stay," he said quickly, "we may find worlds. Think of the time we've wasted sparring, and now—the last night—we find mutual and human sympathies."

The maid of honor leaned back on the cushions smiling. The best man's enthusiasm was new and curious.

"It seems to me," he went on, with boyish eagerness, "that reason, honesty and unselfishness are the bases of an enduring marriage. That's why Ralph and Elsa will be happy."

"Oh, you're not a cynic!" exclaimed the maid of honor. "It was only a pose to cover what you try o be ashamed of."

He laughed, and his face flushed again.

"Do you know," she added softly, "nothing in the world is more alluring than the thought of some one who will stand by you year after year, who will put up with your foolishness, a lovely, loyal friend who will be your playmate forever and ever?"

"That's it!" he cried. "We're discoverers. Don't you see that you and I could quarrel and make up and be happy?"

A babel of voices, excited laughter and a scurry of feet interrupted him.

"Quick!" said the maid of honor, springing up. She opened the curtains and hurried out.

"They're gone," she pouted, coming slowly back.

"I'm so sorry," apologized the best man, skillfully drawing the curtains behind her. "I ought not to have"—

"Indeed you ought not," she averred severely.

"Forgive me. We would have caught only a glimpse of them, and these minutes in here have meant"—

"Oh, no, no!" she faltered. "They mean nothing. Weddings are contagious. These are symptoms."

"And the cure?" he laughed.

"Immediate separation."

"Twenty minutes too late!" he cried joyously. "Let's have another wedding!"

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